

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: N/A
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SUBJ: NEW AUSTRALIAN REFUGEE ALLOTMENT

SUMMARY: GOA ANNOUNCED TODAY THAT AUSTRALIA WOULD ACCEPT 9,000
REFUGEES IN 1978/79. TEXT OF ANNOUNCEMENT RELEASED BY MINISTER
OF IMMIGRATION AND ETHNIC AFFAIRS IS QUOTED BELOW:

THE GOVERNMENT REAFFIRMED ITS CONTINUING COMMITMENT TO THE
RESETTLEMENT OF INDO-CHINESE REFUGEES TODAY.

"AUSTRALIA HAS A PROUD HISTORY AS A MAJOR CONTRIBUTOR IN
RESETTLEMENT AND ASSISTANCE TO REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PEOPLE.
WE WILL CONTINUE THIS ROLE BY HELPING TO ALLEVIATE THE PLIGHT
OF PEOPLE IN OVER-CROWDED CAMPS IN MALAYSIA AND THAILAND," THE
MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION AND ETHNIC AFFAIRS, THE HON. M.J.R.
MACKELLAR, SAID IN RELEASING DETAILS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S
DECISION.

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"ONE OF THE FIRST ACTIONS OF THE GOVERNMENT AFTER COMING TO
OFFICE IN 1975 WAS TO ARRANGE FOR THE RESETTLEMENT OF
INDO-CHINESE REFUGEES. SINCE THEN WE HAVE CONTINUED TO SHOW OUR
CONCERN FOR THOSE WHO HAVE FLED VIETNAM, LAOS AND CAMBODIA."

MR. MACKELLAR SAID THE GOVERNMENT'S CONCERN FOR REFUGEES HAD BEEN
REFLECTED THROUGH A NUMBER OF INITIATIVES INCLUDING:

- . THE SETTING UP OF MACHINERY TO DESIGNATE REFUGEE SITUATIONS AND APPROPRIATE RESPONSES TO THEM,
- . DECISIONS TO TAKE INCREASING NUMBERS OF INDO-CHINESE IN 1977/78,
- . THE LOCATION OF IMMIGRATION TEAMS IN THAILAND AND MALAYSIA TO ENABLE THIS TO BE ACHIEVED,
- . THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A REFUGEE BRANCH OF THE DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION AND ETHNIC AFFAIRS,
- . THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A COMMITTEE ON THE DETERMINATION OF REFUGEE STATUS (THE DORS COMMITTEE) TO DETERMINE APPLICATIONS FROM PEOPLE IN AUSTRALIA CLAIMING REFUGEE STATUS.

"THE REFUGEE SITUATION IN THAILAND AND MALAYSIA HAS REACHED EXTREMELY SERIOUS PROPORTIONS. OVER 110,000 REFUGEES ARE CURRENTLY IN CAMPS IN THAILAND AND OVER 7,500 ARE IN CAMPS IN MALAYSIA", MR. MACKELLAR SAID.

"DURING RECENT WEEKS THE NUMBERS OF REFUGEES ARRIVING IN SMALL BOATS OFF THE COAST OF THAILAND AND MALAYSIA HAS MORE THAN DOUBLED WITH OVER 4,000 ARRIVING IN THE PAST MONTH.

"THE CROWDED CONDITION OF THE CAMPS, THE ESCALATING NUMBERS OF PEOPLE LEAVING VIETNAM AND THE CONTINUING UNAUTHORISED ARRIVAL OF REFUGEES IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIA HAS STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF A CONTINUING AND BROADER INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE TO THE INDO-CHINESE REFUGEE SITUATION.
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"THESE MATTERS WERE THE SUBJECT OF INTENSIVE CONSULTATIONS WITH VICE-PRESIDENT MONDALE DURING HIS RECENT VISIT TO AUSTRALIA. THE UNITED STATES HAS INDICATED A COMMITMENT TOWARDS MOVING MORE QUICKLY THOSE THEY HAVE ACCEPTED FOR ENTRY TO THEIR COUNTRY. THIS INCLUDES REFUGEES WHO ARRIVED WITHOUT AUTHORISATION IN AUSTRALIA BUT WHO HAD ALREADY BEEN ACCEPTED FOR RESETTLEMENT IN THE U.S.

"THE UNITED STATES WOULD ALSO JOIN WITH AUSTRALIA IN EFFORTS TO OBTAIN WIDER INTERNATIONAL INVOLVEMENT IN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT. IT WAS AGREED THAT CONTINUING CONSULTATIONS ON THE REFUGEE PROBLEM WOULD TAKE PLACE."

THE AUSTRALIA GOVERNMENT WHICH HAD BEEN CONSTANTLY MONITORING DEVELOPMENTS, HAD DECIDED ON A NUMBER OF FURTHER INITIATIVES. THESE INCLUDE:

- . OUR DETERMINATION TO ACTIVELY PURSUE THE "INTERNATIONALISATION" OF THE APPROACH TO THE INDO-CHINESE SITUATION BY CONCERTED ACTION WITH THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND OTHER RECEIVING COUNTRIES TO PERSUADE MORE NATIONS TO ACCEPT REFUGEES FOR RESETTLEMENT,

. HIGH LEVEL APPROACHES TO REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS SEEKING THEIR
CO-OPERATION IN HOLDING VIETNAMESE VESSELS IN TRANSIT TO
ENABLE PROCESSING OF BOAT PEOPLE IN THOSE COUNTRIES,
. A DECISION TO ACCEPT 9,000 INDO-CHINESE REFUGEES IN 1978/79.
. AN APPROACH TO THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSION FOR
REFUGEES SEEKING GREATER INVOLVEMENT OF THAT ORGANISATION
AMONG RECEIVING COUNTRIES AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS.

"PROVIDED OTHER COUNTRIES ALSO PLAY THEIR PART, WE CAN ASSIST
IN THE MORE RAPID RESETTLEMENT OF INDO-CHINESE REFUGEES FROM
THE CAMPS TO TRY TO REACH AUSTRALIA," MR. MACKELLAR SAID.

"IN SAYING THIS, I WOULD STRESS THAT OUR RESPONSES TO DATE HAVE
BEEN LARGELY EFFECTIVE. ONE NEEDS ONLY TO COMPARE THE FIGURES
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OF OVER 4,000 BOAT PEOPLE REACHING TRANSIT CAMPS IN THAILAND
AND MALAYSIA DURING THE LAST MONTH WITH THE 1,500 WHO HAVE
SAILED TO AUSTRALIA IN THE LAST TWO YEARS.

"NEVERTHELESS, THE SITUATION IS OBVIOUSLY OF CONCERN AND I PLAN
TO VISIT A NUMBER OF REGIONAL CAPITALS SOON TO ASSESS THE
SITUATION PERSONALLY, TO HAVE DISCUSSIONS WITH THE APPROPRIATE
GOVERNMENTS AND TO REPORT FURTHER TO THE CABINET."
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